

HOMILY for 5th SUNDAY of EASTER – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talks about Jesus' departure for Heaven to be with God the Father. Reflecting on that, I recall this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

"And how are you, my dear?" a kind relative asked a widow at her husband's funeral.

"Good as can be expected, I guess," replied the old woman. "I'll miss him dearly, but it was his time to go."

"Are you in pretty good health?" the relative asked.

"Well, my eyes are so bad I can hardly tell what I'm eating. My hands shake so much that I can't drink anything hot. My medicine makes me dizzy and I can't turn my neck because of my arthritis. But, thank the good Lord, I can still drive!"

Anyway, we have learned that Jesus was raised from the dead & had appeared to some of His disciples. Today's Gospel tells us that He was returning to Heaven to be with God the Father. His suffering & death already brought His disciples lots of pain & sadness. Then, some of them claimed that they had seen the risen Lord. That news stirred up a lot of excitement among the disciples. But, they were still not sure what all of that meant & how their master's resurrection might change their future & fortune. Now, He wanted to say farewell to them & really left them behind. Here is how today's Gospel shares with us Jesus' farewell speech, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God & faith also in me. In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for you? I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, & then I shall come back to take you with me, that where I am you also may be. You know the way that leads where I go."

I do not know if you have ever been in a situation like that & been left behind like those disciples. You would certainly feel scared & bewildered as you try to survive & fend for yourself. When we talk about being left behind, I'm reminded of someone who dies & leaves behind his/her family & friends, or a family who goes on a long trip & forgets someone at home like in the movie "Home Alone." In that movie, as you might recall, a family was in a hurry to go on their vacation, & they completely forgot to bring along their youngest child. Kevin was left behind & felt totally rejected. He was scared & lost at first. He was not sure why his family left for vacation without him. He might even wonder if they still loved him. While trying to make sense out of that confusing situation, he spotted some suspicious look from strangers around him. He immediately took shelter in his home & avoided any contact with the world around him. But, his safe shelter did not last long. Soon he had to face two heartless thieves who were determined to rob his home & hurt him. He did not give in & surrender to those bad guys. He decided to put up a tough fight & defend his home. He succeeded on his mission & made his family proud. That is one story about someone who was left behind.

Here is another story that we hear a lot about in our daily life. I'm sure you have talked to people whose loved ones were called home to the Lord. They feel distraught & lost to be left behind. They wonder why God took their loved ones home & left them back here on earth. They want to know what they are supposed to do with the rest of their lives. They are confused & scared about facing the world & their uncertain future all by themselves. They do not know if they could survive in this challenging world without their deceased family members or friends. They wish that they could have done something to keep those relationships last a bit longer.

They want to have a peek at God's plan for them & understand it a little better. Perhaps, they could use some divine support & guidance in their time of confusion & hopelessness.

Those two stories tell us how the disciples felt as Jesus left them behind to return to Heaven to be with God the Father. They had been with Him for some time & enjoyed helping Him with His ministry. He gave their lives purpose & brought their future hope. He was a wise teacher & a special friend. Now they had to say farewell to Him & felt quite distraught about the departure of Jesus. They did not know if they would ever see Him again. Moreover, they wondered how their future might turn out without their master in it. That is why Thomas asked Jesus this question on behalf of all the disciples in today's Gospel as he said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, & the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father also. From this point on you know Him; you have seen Him." In other words, Jesus wanted them to keep their trust & hope in Him. For He would continue to guide them & watch over them from His new home. One day He would return to take them to the same place.

What were they supposed to do while waiting for His second coming? The answer for that question can be found in today's First Reading. They were supposed to continue the mission of Jesus & take good care of the Christian community. They should look after the widows & treat everyone with the same dignity & respect. They should continue to take care of the daily needs of the poor & heal the broken. They should preach the Good News of Jesus & bring hope to the world. That is how they could deal with the fate of the ones being left behind. Similarly, we could deal with the loss of Jesus & other deceased loved ones if we could give our lives a purpose & something to hope for. When we take care of the misfortunate around us & do charity work, we live our lives with a purpose. When we try to follow Jesus' teachings & look forward to His rewards for us after this life, we give our lives hope to believe in. That is how we might cope with the fact that Jesus left us behind & return to Heaven.

My dear brothers & sisters, we are distraught & lost to be the ones who are left behind whether we talk about the departure of Jesus or our deceased loved ones. But, we are reminded in today's readings to deal with that by putting our trust in Him & trying to give our lives a purpose to live for & hope to believe in. When we help out the misfortunate like the widows & do other charity work, we live for a purpose. When we look forward to see Jesus & other deceased loved ones again, we have something to hope for. That is how we can learn to cope with the fact of being the ones who are left behind.